The Clan Call

By Hapsburg Liebe

A FEUD OF THE TENNESSEE MOUNTAINS

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The awakening was exceedingly rude. Dale wheeled, his gray eyes ablaze, and saw only a tiny cloud of smoke-mist rising from the laurels more than fifty feet away.

"Come out, you coward!" he roared. "Come out and let me see you," curiosity taking the place of anger in his voice. "I've always wanted to know just what a real highwayman was like!"

The muffled sound of a twig breaking a short distance off to his left next claimed his attention. He was being closely watched by a pair of the finest, clearest brown eyes he had ever seen. He saw her eyes first; he never forgot that.

She was standing on a low cliff beyond the sparkling creek that flowed beside the railroad, and she was partially hidden by a clump of blooming laurel. But Dale could see that she was about twenty; that every line of her rounded, graceful figure whispered of a doelike strength; that she was as straight as a young pine; that her chestnut-brown hair caught the sunlight, and that her face was oval-shaped and handsome—rather than pretty—in spite of its tan.

Dale took off his hat. There was a bullet hole in the very top of its high-peaked crown.

"Who's the robber?" he frowned.

The girl blushed.

"Mebbe he ain't a robber," she said. "Mebbe he thought you was somebody else. Anyhow, you ain't bad hurt, are ye?"

Dale smiled. "Oh, not seriously!"

"You ain't likely to be, ef ye behave yeself."

And that's how the hero and heroine of "The Clan Call" meet. Out of the ordinary! Rather. But then they meet in an extraordinary part of the United States of America where live "the purest-blooded of all Americans, whom other and educated Americans left in the darkness of ignorance in order that they might send missionaries and educators to foreign countries—the greatest mistake of church and society since the Civil war."

But it's a fascinating country and a fascinating people. And this is a fascinating story of it and them. Of course it's a feud story. The hero is a city man, with an out-of-doors mind; the heroine a girl of the mountains. A feud intervenes between them, but love laughs at feuds, as it does at locksmiths.

Hapsburg (Charles Haven) Liebe is the man of all men to tell this story. Native of the Tennessee mountains, soldier, lumberjack, saw-fitter, patriot and self-made literary craftsman, he knows the land and the people. And his story is a labor of love.

CHAPTER I.

—1—

David Moreland's Mountain.

Carlyle Wilburton Dale—known to himself and a few close friends as Bill Dale—had laid out a course of action almost before the northbound train had left the outskirts of the state capital behind. It incurred facing big odds; but other men had faced big odds and won out, and what others had done he could do. Indeed, he had already done several things which other men might not have thought of doing, and one of them was leaving a bride, not figuratively but literally, at the altar in a fashionable church! But he knew Patricia hadn't wanted to marry him any more than he had wanted to marry her.

It was only natural for him to think of coal, now that he had cut loose for all time from the "set" in which he had always been a colossal misfit, now that he must pull his own oars or virtually perish. He had heard coal talked since the day of his birth; to him coal and business meant exactly the same.

One of his father's associates had often spoken of a fine vein in the mountains of eastern Tennessee—had often tried to persuade his father to look into it, to no avail. Young Dale remembered that this vein lay not far from a long railroad siding called the Halfway Switch, in the vicinity of Big Pine mountain. The owners were mountain folk of English descent, his father's associate had said. Decidedly strange, thought Dale, that his father had never cared to investigate it.

The cindery little train reached the long siding about the middle of a fine spring morning. Dale took up his bag, hastened out, and soon found himself standing alone in the heart of an extremely wild section of country.

When the noises of the little train and the fast mail it had just met had died away, there came the saucy chattering of boomer-squirrels and the sweet twittering of birds. Dale caught the joyous spirit. He could have fairly shouted out of the fullness of his very human heart. Here all was unspoiled and unprofaned, and something whispered within him:

"They won't call you a savage here—make this your own country!"

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"You ain't likely to be, ef ye behave yeself."

"If I behave myself—!" Dale laughed. "Why, I couldn't be naughty if I tried; I'm the one and only mamma's little Willie-boy! I wonder if I could put up at some house near here; eh?"

"The' might be," she said, thoughtfully.

"Where?"

"At pap's, or grandpap's, or with 'most any o' my people; or," she added with a contemptuous twist to her lips, "you might stay with some o' them low-down Morelands."

"Where do your people live?"

"About six mile back that way." She pointed over her shoulder with a forefinger.

"Would you mind showing me the way to your parental domicile?"

"What's that, fo' goodness' sake?"

"Your home, you know," Dale explained with a smile.

"Oh, my home. Why didn't ye say so, then? No, I won't," she declared.

Dale put his bag down and rested his hands on his hips.

"Why, may I inquire?"

"'Cause I won't. I don't never keep comp'ny with no strange menfolks. But yander comes By, and he'll show ye the way; he's a-goin' over to the settlement."

Dale faced to the right and saw, coming toward him with steps that would have measured almost four feet, the tallest and lankiest individual he had ever seen outside a circus. The newcomer had a smoothly shaven chin, his coal-black hair was long and his long mustache completely hid the narrow slit that was his mouth. In one hand he carried a repeating rifle.

"Who's that?" Dale half whispered.

"That's By Heck," answered the girl. She continued in a low voice, "His name's Sam Heck; but pap, he called him 'By Heck' one day, and the nickname stuck to him like molasses. Everybody calls him that now, even the revenuers. By, he's the biggest eater, and the biggest liar, in the world! But his lyin' don't never do no harm, and nobody keers. So ef ye want to go to the settlement, mister, By, he'll take ye over. They mebbe ain't got what you're used to fo' eatin', but ye'll be welcome to what the' is."

She laughed a little, turned, and disappeared among the blooming laurels.

The man By Heck wore the poor clothing of a poor hillman. His hat, which had once been black, was all brim and yet all crown; his suspenders, which had been bought with a 'coonhide, were redder than fire; his rundown cowhide boots seemed ridiculously short because of the great length of his slender legs.

When he had reached a point some three yards from Dale, he halted, placed the butt of his rifle carefully between his toes, and leaned on its muzzle; then he deliberately began to take eye measurements of the newcomer.

Dale didn't like the stare—to him it was impudent.

"Well, what's the verdict?" he asked sharply.

"Spoke like a man," drawled By Heck. "I reckon you must be up here a-lookin' fo' coal."

"How did you reach such a conclusion as that?"

"Jest plain hoss sense." The drooping mustache muffled the words somewhat. "The' ain't but three things 'at can bring a city man here, mister," he drawled on, "and them's moonshine stills, bad health, and coal. You shore ai'nt got bad health, and you ain't got the cut of a revenuer, though a few minutes ago I thought mebbe ye was."

"And you shot at me!" said Dale.

"No," objected Heck. "I shot at yore hat. I allus hits at what I shoots at, mister. I wanted ye to turn yore face, so's I could see it, and ye did. As fo' that coal—

"The Morelands, they owns the coal in David Moreland's mountain, and they won't sell it fo' no 'mount o' money. They lives over in the settlement, them and the Littlefords. They're every danged one fine folks. I'm a-goin' over thar now. Want to go 'long? Say—dang my picture ef I didn't fo'git to ax what might be yore name, mister!"

"Bill Dale," came quickly—"Bill Dale. Settlement? Sure! Lead the way, By Heck. Who's the young woman I was talking with when you came up?"

"Who? Her? That's old Ben Littleford's gyurl. Her name's Babe. That's what they call her. She's got another name; but it ain't been used fo' so

"'Cause I Won't. I Don't Never Keep Comp'ny With No Strange Menfolks."

long it's been fo'got, I reckon. She's the youngest one o' old Ben's children. She hain't like none o' the rest o' the Littlefords. By gosh, she's awful high-headed. She can read godd, Babe can. Old Major Bradley, from down at Cartersville in the lowland, he spends his summers up here fo' his health, and he teached Babe how to read. Fine feller, Major Bradley. Lawyer. Babe she has done read everything in the whole danged country. The's sev'ral Bibles, and a book about a Pilgrim's Prog-ress, and a Baker's Hoss and Cattle Almaneck, and a dic-dictionary.

"But we'd better light out fo' the settlement, Mr. Bill, or we'll miss dinner, mebbe. I'm a plumb danged fool about eatin'. I e't twenty-two biscuits o' flour-bread this mornin' fo' breakfus', asides a whole b'iled hamshank, and other things accordin'. It's the dyin' truth! Come on, Mr. Bill."

They went down to the creek, crossed it on stones, and began to climb the low cliff.

After an hour's traveling Heck stopped in the trail and put the butt of his rifle to the ground.

"From right here, Bill," he said, "we can see every house in the whole danged settlement."

They were standing on the crest of David Moreland's mountain. Below them lay a broad valley checkered with small farms; and each farm had its log cabin, its log barn and its apple orchard. Beyond it all rose the great and majestic Big Pine, which was higher and more rugged with cliffs than David Moreland's mountain.

"The Morelands lives on this side o' the river, and the Littlefords lives on yan side," drawled Heck. "They don't never have nothing to do with each other, but they don't hardly ever fight; they're all strappin' big men, and they fights so danged hard it don't pay. My gosh, Bill, every man of 'em can shoot a gnat's eyelash off at four hundred yards—I wisht I may drap dead ef they cain't! Do ye see that big cabin right plumb in the middle o' the nigh half o' the settlement, Bill? Well, the boss o' the Morelands he lives thar—John Moreland. That's whar you want to go, Bill, sence ye've got a oncyorable case o' the disease knowed as coal-on-the-brain. But I can tell ye aforehand, you ain't got enough money to buy that coal, don't matter how much money ye've got."

Dale was not looking toward John Moreland's home now. His gaze had wandered to the other side of the river. By Heck waited a full minute for a reply to his speech, then he spoke again:

"The gyurl, or the coal—is that what's a-botherin' ye, Bill?"

Dale's eyes twinkled. "Must I choose between them?" he laughed.

"Shore!" By Heck wasn't even smiling. "Shore! The Morelands and Littlefords hates each other wuss nor a blue-tailed hawk hates a crow. The gyurl, or the coal, Bill?"

"We'll go down to John Moreland's," announced Dale.

The mountaineer took up his rifle. "Let me gi' ye a word or two o' warnin'," he continued seriously. "Don't you offer to pay John Moreland fo' eatin' his grub, nor fo' sleepin' in his bed, nor fo' chawin' his tobacker. Ef ye do, yore goose will shore be cooked with John Moreland. But ef ye was to brag on the vittles a little, John's wife a-bein' pow'ful handy in the kitchen, it wouldn't do a danged bit o' harm. Do ye onderstand it all now, Bill?"

Dale nodded, and they began the descent.

John Moreland's house was built of whole oak logs, which were chinked with oak splits and daubed in between with clay; the roof was of handmade boards, and a chimney of stones and clay rose at either end.

John Moreland himself sat on the front porch, and beside him lay a repeating rifle, two young squirrels that had been very neatly shot through the head, and a weary black-and-tan hound. He was an uncommonly big man, and about forty-seven; his eyes were gray and keen; his thick hair and full beard were a rich brown, with only a few threads of white. There was a certain English fineness about the man. One felt that he could trust John Moreland.

As the moonshiner and his companion reached the gate Moreland rose and pushed his hat back from his forehead.

"Hi, John," grinned Heck. "This here feller wants to stay with ye a few days, John. Seems to be all right."

"Come right in," invited the chief of the Morelands. He indicated the home-made chair he had just vacated. "Set down thar and rest, stranger. I'll be back in a minute or so."

He hastened into the cabin, carrying the squirrels with him.

"He's went to tell his wife to hatch up a extry good dinner, Bill," whispered Heck. "Pepper-cyored ham, young chicken, hot biscuits, fresh butter, wild honey, huckleberry pie and peach pie and strawberry presarves—Bill, I cain't hardly stand it. Blast my picture ef I couldn't eat two whole raw dawgs right now, I'm that ding-busted hongry. Well, I got to ramble on home. I live down the river half a mile, we and my maw. Come to see me, Bill, and we'll go a-fishin'. So long, Bill old boy!"

John Moreland returned presently. The man from the city rose and proffered his hand.

"My name," he began, old habit strong upon him, "is Carlyle—"

Before he could get any farther with it, John Moreland flung the hand from him as though it were a thing of unspeakable contamination. His bearded face went deathly white with the whiteness of an old and bitter hatred. His great fists clenched, and every muscle in his giant body trembled.

"What's the matter, man?" Dale wanted to know.

"Carlyle!" Moreland repeated in a hoarse growl. "You say yore name is Carlyle!"

"Yes," wonderingly, "but that's only a part of it. My name is Carlyle Wilburton Dale—Bill Dale. What's the matter?"

"Did you come from West Virginny?" sharply.

Dale gave the name of his home town and state.

"That's dif'rent." The mountaineer's countenance became lighter. "This man I'm a-thinkin' about, he was from West Virginny. I hope you won't hold nothin' ag'in me fo' actin' up that away. I couldn't he'p it, shore, it seems. You'll know how I felt when I tell ye about it, Mr. Dale. I owe it to ye to explain. Jest a minute—"

He stepped into the cabin and brought out another chair, sat down heavily and crossed his legs. Dale, too, sat down.

"The mountain you had to come over to come here, Mr. Dale," Moreland began, his big voice filled with an old, old sorrow, "is knowed as David Moreland's mountain mostly because David Moreland is buried in the very highest place on top of it, him and his wife. He was my brother, and was the best brother a man ever had. It was allus the talk o' the neighborhood how much we liked each other. Up ontel the time he was married I

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went with him whar he went, and he went with me whar I went. I'd fight fo' him, and he'd fight fo' me. It's hard to tell, even atter this long time....

"David, he was a strappin' big man, like all o' the Morelands. He was about yore size, and grey-eyed like you, and he had brown hair like you. When you walked up to the gate, it made me think o' him the day he was married; he was all dressed up in dark blue like you.... Then David he went up here one summer and found this vein o' coal. He got lawful p'session o' the mountain, and moved his wife up here. The rest of us lived over in the Laurel Fork country then.

"One day I got a letter from David, which said that a man named John K. Carlyle was a-goin' to buy his mountain and the coal, and said that his wife was pow'ful sick. A week later she died, and left a baby which died, too, accordin' to a old Injun by the name o' Cherokee Joe, who knowed my pap and knowed David. And a month later we was all dragged from our beds by this same Cherokee Joe, tellin' us that Carlyle had shot David. Carlyle, Cherokee Joe said, was a-drinkin' hard. The Injun seed the shootin' through a window.

"It was might' nigh to three days later when we got here and found pore David a-layin' whar he'd fell. We scoured the mountains fo' miles and miles around in a s'arch fo' the dawg who killed him, but we never found him.... The land up here looked purty, and it belonged to us by David's death; so we all moved up here to live, and built us cabins.

"Major Bradley found out about the end o' my brother, and he wanted us to put the case in the hands o' the law. But we wouldn't do it. A Moreland never goes to law about anything. He pays his own debts, and he collects what is his due—"

John Moreland arose and paced the porch floor, which creaked under his weight. He stopped before Dale, and went on sadly:

"Now ye'll know why I was so much tore up when I heered yore name, the Carlyle part. John K. Carlyle killed the best man 'at ever lived. And mebbe ye'll onderstand why we ain't never had the conscience to sell the coal, which cost Brother David his life."

Moreland's guest sat staring absently toward a brown-winged butterfly that was industriously sipping honey from the heart of a honeysuckle bloom. He gave no sign that he had heard anything out of the ordinary, but in an odd, persistent way his mind seemed to connect his father, John K. Dale, with the story he had just heard.

John K. Dale had come originally from West Virginia, and he had flatly refused, time upon time, to make any investigation of the Moreland coal property.

The hillman interrupted young Dale's thinking:

"Addie, she's a-goin' to have dinner ready purty soon. Would ye like to wash, Mr. Dale?"

"Yes," was the answer, and in the tones of Bill Dale's quiet voice there was a shade of meaning that Moreland did not catch. "Yes, I'd like to wash."

"What was you a-doin' here a-talkin' to my gyurl?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Editors as Exhibits.

They are shameless, abandoned people in South America. They make fun of editors!

The following paragraph appeared in the Buenos Aires Herald recently: "At the Press club carnival ball the editors of all the papers in town will be on view from one to two in the morning, free and for nothing, a special cage having been built to hold their bodies, and another arrangement for the support of their weighty brows. Those who have never yet seen such people in the raw, so to speak, are advised to book early and avoid the rush, but the public is hereby warned that nothing may be poked through the bars, the exhibits having regular feeding times, even as you and I."

Naturally.

"Do you like playing?"

"Yes, preferably in 'Macbeth' and 'Hamlet.'"

"Why?"

"The ghost always walks."—Cartoons Magazine.

Acquired Liking.

He—do you believe there is anything in names?

She—Yes, I do. My girl chum's name is Olive, and I didn't like her at all at first.—Boston Transcript.